



**Department of
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News Release

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VA Recognizes “Presumptive” Illnesses in Iraq, Afghanistan *Decision Simplifies Application for Disability Pay*

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki today announced the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is taking steps to make it easier for Veterans to obtain disability compensation for certain diseases associated with service in the Persian Gulf War or Afghanistan. This will be the beginning of historic change for how VA considers Gulf War Veterans’ illnesses.

Following recommendations made by VA’s Gulf War Veterans Illnesses Task Force, VA is publishing a proposed regulation in the *Federal Register* that will establish new presumptions of service connection for nine specific infectious diseases associated with military service in Southwest Asia during the Persian Gulf War, or in Afghanistan on or after September 19, 2001.

“We recognize the frustrations that many Gulf War and Afghanistan Veterans and their families experience on a daily basis as they look for answers to health questions, and seek benefits from VA,” said Secretary Shinseki.

The proposed rule includes information about the long-term health effects potentially associated with the nine diseases: Brucellosis, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Coxiella burnetii* (Q fever), malaria, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, Nontyphoid *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, Visceral leishmaniasis and West Nile virus.

For non-presumptive conditions, a Veteran is required to provide medical evidence that can be used to establish an actual connection between military service in Southwest Asia or in Afghanistan, and a specific disease.

With the proposed rule, a Veteran will only have to show service in Southwest Asia or Afghanistan, and a current diagnosis of one of the nine diseases. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted over the next 60 days. A final regulation will be published after consideration of all comments received.

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Proposed Regulations for Gulf War Illnesses – 2/2/2/2

The decision was made after reviewing the 2006 report of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), titled, “Gulf War and Health Volume 5: Infectious Diseases.” The 2006 report differed from the four prior reports by looking at the long-term health effects of certain diseases determined to be pertinent to Gulf War Veterans.

The 1998 Persian Gulf War Veterans Act requires the Secretary to review NAS reports that study scientific information and possible associations between illnesses and exposure to toxic agents by Veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War.

Because the Persian Gulf War has not officially been declared ended, Veterans serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom are eligible for VA’s new presumptions. Secretary Shinseki decided to include Afghanistan Veterans in these presumptions because NAS found that the nine diseases are prevalent in that country.

Noting that today’s proposed regulation reflects a significant determination of a positive association between service in the Persian Gulf War and certain diseases, Secretary Shinseki added, “By setting up scientifically-based presumptive service connection, we give these deserving Veterans a simple way to get the benefits they have earned in service to our country.”

Last year, VA received more than one million claims for disability compensation and pension. VA provides compensation and pension benefits to over 3.8 million Veterans and beneficiaries. Presently, the basic monthly rate of compensation ranges from \$123 to \$2,673 to Veterans without any dependents.

Disability compensation is a non-taxable, monthly monetary benefit paid to Veterans who are disabled as a result of an injury or illness that was incurred or aggravated during active military service.

For more information about health problems associated with military service during operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and related VA programs go to www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/ or go to www.va.gov for information about disability compensation.